Importance of the Case Study

Case studies provide public relations practitioners with examples of good and bad public relations tactics. In some instances, a case study provides insight into how a public relations firm operated, such as Karen Miller's case study of Hill & Knowlton. Others might provide insight into how public relations was not employed and the impact of that failure, such as James O'Rourke's Ford Motor Company versus Firestone. Each provides the practitioner with examples of successful and unsuccessful strategy and tactics.

Don W. Stacks

See also Benchmarking; Content Analysis; Goals; Objectives; Qualitative Research

Further Readings

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CATALYTIC MODEL OF ISSUES MANAGEMENT

The catalytic model of issues management explains how organizations can proactively initiate certain issues and stimulate the public agenda with the goal of managing an issue through its life cycle. Richard E. Crable and Steven L. Vibbert (1985) extended Barry Jones and Howard Chase's (1979) process model of issue management by proposing a catalytic model that maintains that organizations should not merely respond to developing issues and react to the strategies of others but should instead catalyze issue discussions as a means to achieve organizational goals.

The catalytic model segments issues into life cycles with five stages: (1) *potential* stage, when one or more individuals attach significance to a problem; (2) *imminent* stage, when many others accept a problem as a legitimate concern; (3) *current* stage, when the media widely disseminate information about an issue, making an issue a topic of conversation among many stakeholders; (4) *critical* stage, when an issue is ready for decision and groups argue for a resolution in their favor; and (5) *dormant* stage, when policy decisions on an issue have been made or an issue is "resolved." Issues often resurface when new problems are identified, in effect restarting the issue life cycle again, at various stages.

The catalytic approach argues that organizations should not wait for potential issues to become salient to others to start managing them. There are three steps in catalytic issues management.

Situation Assessment. Issue managers need to take stock of potential outcomes that benefit profit or survival motives of the organization. Managers should examine how environmental conditions enable or constrain desired outcomes.

Goal Establishment. Organizations catalyze favorable policy by creating issues and effectively managing them to a desired outcome. Desired outcomes should be solidified into clear goals and objectives. Managers should identify what law, policy, economic, cultural, or informational factors need to change in order for organizational goals and objectives to become reality. Subsequently, managers should assess the potential positive effects of a change against potentially negative effects. If the potential positive effects outweigh the negative, managers determine if the organization can indeed catalyze the desired change through influencing the policy process.

Agenda Stimulation. An organization can work to establish an issue's potential with internal and external publics through tactics that explain the issue as justified and legitimate. Moving an issue to the imminent stage is accomplished by gaining the involvement and endorsement of other groups so

that an issue becomes legitimized in the eyes of many stakeholders. Next, through agenda-building techniques and media relations, issue managers try to position and frame an issue in the mass media, helping it to reach the current stage and become part of the public agenda. In the critical stage, skills such as lobbying are needed to influence public policy and resolve an issue in a manner that benefits the organization.

As a long-term planning tool, the catalytic model enables organizations to initiate desired issue discussions rather than waiting for others to develop trends or favorable policy conditions. While initially conceptualized as a tool for business, research has widely recognized that all forms of organizations—corporate, government, nonprofit, or activist—can catalytically manage issues to their advantage.

Erich J. Sommerfeldt

See also Agenda-Setting Theory; Framing Theory; Goals; Issues Management; Lobbying; Media Relations; Objectives; Public Policy Planning

Further Readings

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CAUSE MODEL OF RISK AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION

The CAUSE model is an approach to studying risk and crisis communication. Inspired by Lloyd Bitzer's (1968) concept of the rhetorical situation, this model assumes that situations where people are communicating about hazard or threat are beset by predictable tensions. Katherine Rowan (1991, 2009) and associates argued that these tensions are suggested by components of all human communication (i.e., sources, messages, topics, channels, and contexts) and indexed by the letters in the word, CAUSE. When people communicate about

an uncertain danger, a lack of trust or *confidence* is likely. Often there are challenges in gaining *awareness* of danger. Third, even when awareness exists, deep *understanding* of the harm may not. Fourth, because risk and crisis communication situations involve matters where people disagree, there is a need to build *satisfaction* with solutions. Finally, because such situations involve motivating people to move from merely agreeing that some behavior is a good idea to acting on that belief by, for example, locating the exits in a theater, *enactment* is often crucial.

Research on these five tensions and steps for managing them is available in fields, such as communication, psychology, disaster sociology, political science, management, and decision sciences. Scholars and practitioners use the model by asking, in the context studied, what is the *principal* tension or obstacle and what steps reduce that tension?

For example, in 2012, the Metropolitan subway in Washington, D.C., stopped systemwide for 30 minutes on a hot summer Saturday. Temperatures climbed in some cars; occupants began to feel ill. Some riders were tourists who did not know they could contact the train operator through an intercom to report their discomfort. After this event, officials said the stoppage occurred because of a hardware problem and that since their computers are on a "closed loop" system, they were not vulnerable to cyber attack.

To use CAUSE to analyze this situation, one might ask: Did officials' statements earn *confidence*? In many risk and crisis situations, earning confidence is the most difficult step. Were Metro riders sufficiently *aware* of their options if the temperature in their compartment became unbearable? Research shows that people have trouble detecting slow onset problems, such as slowly increasing heat. Did stakeholders *understand* the statement that the computerized system running Metro is a "closed loop" system? Is it the case that closed-loop systems are not vulnerable to cyber attack? Were riders and officials *satisfied* with management of this incident? Will riders continue to use Metro? This final question is raised by the *E* for *enactment*.

After considering such questions, one can determine which tensions were most severe and identify steps to address them. The CAUSE model has been used to explore communication challenges